

211131Z Dec 01

2001HOCHI01411 - UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED PTQ4442

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ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	SRPP-00	EB-00
	UTED-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00
	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIC-02	OPIC-01	PC-01	PRS-00	P-00
	SP-00	SS-00	STR-00	TEST-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	PRM-00
	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/008W		

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FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5812
INFO AMEMBASSY HANOI PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 001411

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV AND EAP/PD/MSPEER
DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM KIRF VM ETMIN HUMANR RELFREE

SUBJECT: PROTESTANTS WARNED NOT TO "CAUSE PROBLEMS" AT CHRISTMAS

11. (SBU) SEVERAL HCMC PROTESTANT "HOUSE CHURCH" LEADERS TOLD POLOFF ON DECEMBER 19, THAT LOCAL POLICE HAD CALLED THEM IN INDIVIDUALLY DURING THE WEEK OF DECEMBER UNCLASSIFIED

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9, TO WARN THEM NOT TO USE CHRISTMAS AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO "CAUSE PROBLEMS FOR THE GOVERNMENT." THE PROTESTANT LEADERS SAID THEY INTERPRETED THIS WARNING NOT AS A PROHIBITION ON RELIGIOUS CHRISTMAS GATHERINGS, BUT RATHER AS A CAUTION NOT TO CRITICIZE THE GOVERNMENT AT ANY LARGE PUBLIC GATHERINGS AT CHRISTMAS TIME. THEY EXPECT TO GO AHEAD WITH A PLANNED GATHERING OF UP TO 1000 PROTESTANTS AT A CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE CITY WHOSE PRIESTS HAVE AGREED TO LET THEM "BORROW" THE CHURCH FOR THE PROTESTANT CHRISTMAS SERVICE.

12. (SBU) THE PROTESTANT LEADERS WERE AWARE THAT ON DECEMBER 11, SEVERAL PROTESTANT PASTORS FROM VIETNAM'S CENTRAL HIGHLANDS WERE SUMMONED TO HANOI TO HEAR A SIMILAR WARNING. THE VIETNAM NEWS AGENCY REPORTED THAT NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SPEAKER NGUYEN VAN AN HAD ASKED THE PASTORS TO "CONVEY HIS MERRY CHRISTMAS WISHES TO THE PROTESTANT COMMUNITY IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS," BUT ALSO WARNED THEM TO "STAY VIGILANT AND FIGHT BAD ELEMENTS WHO ABUSE RELIGION TO UNDERMINE NATIONAL UNITY." SEPARATELY, A RELIABLE PROTESTANT SOURCE TOLD EMBASSY POLOFF THAT THE GVN COMMITTEE ON RELIGION HAD SUMMONED SIX CENTRAL HIGHLAND ETHNIC MINORITY LEADERS OF THE RECENTLY LEGALIZED SOUTHERN EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF VIETNAM TO HANOI FROM DECEMBER 7-16 FOR MEETINGS WITH VARIOUS GVN OFFICIALS.

13. (SBU) THE MONTAGNARD FOUNDATION, INC., BASED IN SOUTH CAROLINA, PUT OUT A PRESS RELEASE THAT INCLUDED A PLEA TO PRESIDENT BUSH AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO MONITOR AN EVENT IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS WHERE UNCLASSIFIED

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"HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF HILL TRIBE MONTAGNARDS WILL UNITE IN A PEACEFUL PRAYER VIGIL TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS AND CALL FOR AN END TO MARTIAL LAW BY HANOI'S COMMUNIST AUTHORITIES AND TO RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN VIETNAM." THE MONTAGNARD FOUNDATION ALLEGEDLY WAS INVOLVED IN ORGANIZING ETHNIC MINORITY DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS LAST FEBRUARY AND MARCH. A RELIABLE PROTESTANT SOURCE TOLD POLOFF THAT THE MONTAGNARD FOUNDATION WAS INVOLVED IN ORGANIZING A PROTESTANT CELEBRATION OF APPROXIMATELY 2000 ETHNIC GIA RAI MINORITY PERSONS IN CHU A THAI VILLAGE IN GIA LAI PROVINCE LAST CHRISTMAS. (COMMENT: POST BELIEVES IT IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THE ETHNIC MINORITY PROTESTANTS COULD ORGANIZE A SIMILARLY LARGE GATHERING THIS CHRISTMAS BECAUSE OF THE CONTINUING EMPHASIS ON SECURITY BY PROVINCIAL AND DISTRICT AUTHORITIES IN THE AREA. END COMMENT.)

14. (SBU) THE HCMC PROTESTANT LEADERS SAID THEY HAVE HEARD FROM PROTESTANT PASTORS IN OTHER PROVINCES WHO HAVE ALSO BEEN WARNED NOT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CHRISTMAS TO "CAUSE PROBLEMS." THEY SAID THEY WERE UNAWARE OF ANY PLANNED LARGE GATHERING IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. THEY EMPHASIZED THAT THEIR OWN CHRISTMAS SERVICE IN HCMC WILL BE A RELIGIOUS CELEBRATION AND WILL NOT TOUCH ON POLITICS IN ANY WAY.

YAMAUCHI

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